

# The Returned Klondyker



HER HAT FELL OFF AS SHE CROSSED POLK STREET.

(By Gellett Burgess and Will Irwin.)

James Wiswell Coffin, 34, had a new but fully fledged philosophy buzzing in his brain. Enlightenment had come in a hint dropped by Coffee John himself.

The curve of fortune is like a wave. It should be heaved heavily while it ascends, and lightly on the decline. Mine is undoubtedly rising. Go to! I shall proceed to gamble!

But how gamble at midnight with a capital of but one dime? In no other city in the world is it so easy as in San Francisco, that quaint rendezvous of saloons and cigar stands. The cigar slot machine or "hard luck box" is a nickel lottery played by good and bad alike; for it has a reputation no shadier than the church raffle or the juvenile grabbag, and is tolerated as a harmless safety valve for the lust of gambling.

Gunchke's cigar shop was still open as Coffin reached the corner of Bush street. He walked briskly inside the open saleroom (for a cigar shop has but three walls in San Francisco's gentle climate) and, with the assurance of one who has just touched a jump-back and the carelessness of a millionaire, he exchanged Coffee John's dime for two nickels, dropped one down the slot of the machine on the counter and sprang the handle. The five wheels of playing cards whirled madly, then stopped, leaving a poker hand exposed behind the wire. He had caught a pair of kings, good for a "bit" cigar.

Coffin was disappointed and yet after all, there was a slight gain in the transaction. Investing 5 cents he had won 12 1-2 cents worth of merchandise. It was not sufficiently marvelous to turn his head, but his luck was evidently on the up-curve, though it was rising slowly enough. He took the other nickel—and jerked the handle again, awaiting with eagerness for the cards to come to a standstill.

As the wheels settled into place a man with green eyes and a bediamonded shirt front came up and leaned over Coffin's shoulder. "Good work! A straight flush, by crickets!—forty cigars! Get in and break the bank, young fellow!"

Coffin turned to him with nonchalance, while the clerk marked the winnings in a book. "N—n—n! I know when I've got enough."

"Play for me, then, will you?" the other rejoined. "You've got luck, you have."

"I don't propose to make a present of it to you, if I have; I need every stitch of it myself." And then Coffin touched with a happy thought, began to swagger. "Beside, if I'm going to smoke this forty up tonight I've got to get busy myself." He looked knowingly at the goods displayed for his choice, pinching the wrinkles. "I've never had all the cigars I could smoke yet, and I'm going to try my limit. Got any African Panatelas, Colorado Maduro?" he asked the clerk. A small box was taken down from the shelf. Coffin accepted it and walked leisurely toward the door.

"Good Lord!" cried the stranger, following him. "You don't think you can tackle forty cigars on a stretch, do you? Kid, it'll kill you."

"It's a beautiful death," Coffin replied, jauntily, "you can tell mamma I died happy." The clerk grinned.

"Strikes me you're troubled with youngness," said the stranger, looking him over.

Coffin ruffled at his patronizing tone. "See here! D'you think I can't get away with these forty cigars, smoking 'em in an end-to-end chain down to one-inch butts?"

"I bet you a hundred dollars you get sick as a pig first!" was the reply.

"Taken!" Coffin cried, and went at

him with fire in his eyes. "See here, half all my money on my grand piano, out if you'll trust me I'll trust you without stakes held. We'll get the clerk here to see fair play, and if I don't see this box to a finish or pay up, you two can push the face off me. What d'you say?"

The green-eyed stranger, who had evidently money to spend foolishly, and a night to waste in doing it, assented jocularly. The two waited till the clerk had put up the screen at the front of the shop, and then walked with him around to California street. Half way up the first block stood an old-fashioned wooden house painted drab, with green blinds, in striking contrast to the highest brick buildings that surrounded it. The frame had been brought around Cape Horn in '49, and in pioneer days the place had been one of the most fashionable boarding houses in town. Chinatown now crowded it in; it had fallen into disrepute, and was visited only by the poorer class of foreigners. Over the entrance was a sign bearing the inscription, "Hotel de France." Here the salesman had a room.

The three men sat down and took off their coats and collars for comfort. James Wiswell Coffin, 34, opened the box of Panatelas and regarded them with a sentimental eye.

He hit the end of the first cigar and struck a match. Then he bowed to the company with the theatrical air of a man about to touch off a loaded bomb. "Gentlemen, I proceed to take my degree of Bachelor of Nicotine, if I don't flunk." He lighted the tobacco, quailing, "Ave Caesar!" Mortar to salute!" and blew forth a ring of smoke. It floated upward, smooth and even, hovered over his head a moment like a halo, then withering, scattered and drifted away. Coffin removed the cigar from his mouth and looked thoughtfully at the ash.

"It burns all right," he said; "I want have to put kerosene on 'em to make 'em go. But I chatter, friends, I am garrulous, and it's your edge, stranger. How would it do for you to enlighten the pink and frisky watches of the night by narrating a few of the more fabulous chapters of your autobiography?"

Thus conjured by the young inn, the stranger consented to relate, after a few preliminaries, the following tale: THE STORY OF THE RETURNED KLONDYKER.

This is pretty near the finish, young fellow, of the biggest spending jag this town ever saw. The money cost me sixteen years of tramping and frozen toes, and then it came slap, all in a bunch. So easy come, easy go, says I.

I was breaking north the year of the big find when I struck hard luck. That's too long a yarn to tell. But the end was that I landed two hundred miles from Nowhere, cracked in the head from behind and left for dead in the snow. The Malemute that did it had his finish in Dawson that winter by the rope route, spilling the shot I was saving for him.

I was stooping over, fixing a sled runner, when—bliff! . . . I woke up in an Indian hut filled with smoke. The whole works were buzzing round, and a lot of big, husky bucks and squaws grunting over me. I was for getting up and clearing them out, but I hadn't the strength. For a month I was plum nutty. But every little while, when my head cleared, I'd look up to see a good natured looking brown girl with black eyes taking care of me as carefully as if she was a trained nurse.

As I got over the fever slowly, I made out, she telling me in Chinook, that she had found me half frozen to death, and had carried me fifty miles by sled. How she did it the Lord only

knows. Maybe it was because she was gone on me, which I oughtn't to say, neither, but she sure was. I did a heap of thinking. She had grit and gentleness, and the feelings of a lady, which is what every woman that calls herself such hasn't got, and more I saw of her the better I liked her. So when I got well I had a pow-wow with her father, who was chief of the tribe, and I bought her for ten dogs on tick and my gun, which the darned thief had forgot in the mix-up, and sixty tin tags I'd been saving from for a little while every day, lighter and shampo pipe with. We were married Indian fashion, which is pretty easy, and she came and lived with me in my hut.

Since then I've had plenty of the stuff that's supposed to make a man happy, but I'm blower if I was ever happier than I was that winter, living with the tribe and married to Kate.

Well, that winter was over with at last. It came spring, or what you might call spring, with the ice beginning to melt and the sun getting up for a little while every day, lighter and lighter. One day Kate and I went fishing. She pulled in her line and I saw something that made me forget I was an Indian, adopted into the tribe, all regular. Her sinker was a gold nugget as big as the fist on a posse! I knew it the minute I laid my eyes on it, though it was all black with water and weather. I grabbed it and cut it. It was as soft as lead, reddish yellow.

"Where did you get that?" I said. "Up by the Klondike, Pass, she said, unconcerned like, as if it was pig iron. 'I picked it up because it was heavy.'"

"Can you find the place again?" I asked her.

She studied awhile. But the Indians never forget anything. It's book learning that makes you forget. I knew she'd remember before she got through, and she did. She took her fish line and laid it out in funny curves and loops on top of the snow like a map, knotting it here and there to show the places she knew, mountain peaks, lakes and such like. She had it down fine. When she got done she looked up to me with a grin and said: "Why?"

Then it came to me all of a sudden that she had no idea of the worth of her find. This was before the big rush, and her tribe didn't see white men more than twice a year. Their regular hunting grounds were far to the north. They traded skins and dogs and fish once in a while with traders, and got beads and truck in return. With the other Indians they made change by strings of wampum they call allgachecks. She had no idea of the value of gold, and she'd never seen a piece of money in her life. But I didn't stop to explain then.

"Come on," I said, "we're going to borrow dogs, and sled north to the Katokoolanet country for sure!" She never said a word, but packed up and followed, the way she was trained to do.

We found the place the third day, just like she said we would. Lord, that was a bonanza, all right! You could dig out nuggets with a stick. It was the Katokoolanet diggings you may have heard about.

When I had staked out my claims, two prospectors got wind of it and started the rush. I got our band to move up and help me hold our rights, and when some Seattle agents offered me \$10,000 for my claims, I took it, you bet.

The first thing I did after that was to pay back 100 dogs for the ten I had promised for Kate; then I bought up all the provisions I could get hold of—eggs \$1 a piece, bacon \$5 a pound

—and I fed our band of Indians till they couldn't hold any more. It was Kate brought me the luck, and I felt the winnings were more hers than mine. There wasn't anything too good for her. When a Scandinavian missionary came up to the place we went and got married white fashion, for I wanted my wife to be respected, and after that I insisted that everybody should call her Mrs. Saul Timmey, which made her feel about six foot high every time she heard it.

Well, sir, Kate was a study in those times. She couldn't quite get it through her head for a good while why we could put it over the rest of 'em the way we did. The more I got for her, the more puzzled she was. I recall the first time she ever saw money passed. It was when I bought the dogs. I was paying \$20 gold pieces out of a sack, and she asked me what they were. She thought they were stones, because they looked more than anything like the beach pebbles she had seen on the beach, the kind you throw to skip on the water.

"They're just like allgacheck," I said; then partly for the joke on her, said, "Good medicine (meaning money) you can get anything you want with 'em!"

"Give me some," said Kate, not quite believing me, for it was a pretty big story to swallow, according to her ideas, so I handed her over a stack of twenties.

She took them and went out to try the magic. Going up to find out the met, she held out the whole lot to him, asking him for his slicker. When I came up and said it was all right, he peeled it right off and handed it over to her, grabbing the money quick. That was a new one on her, and she couldn't quite believe it then. Well, it was funny to see the way she acted. She pretty near bought up everything in camp she took a fancy to, just for the fun of seeing the magic work, and she was as excited as a kid with a brand new toy.

We came out of the country finally, and took a steamer for San Francisco for I wanted to see the old town again and show Kate what big cities were like, beside giving her the chance to spend all the money she wanted on logs and jewelry. We drove up from the wharf in the best turnout I could find, and put up at the Palace Hotel in the third suite. The best was none too good for Kate and me while I was flush.

I rather guess we broke the record for spending, the two weeks we stayed there. I had three or four cases of champagne opened in the first two days, and the bell boys knew they didn't have to be asked, but would just pop the cork and let her fizz. I got a great big music box that cost more than a piano, with drums and bells inside, and we kept it a going while we were eating, which was most of the time we weren't out doing the town. I blowed myself for an outfit of sparklers, of which this stone in my shirt front is the last sole survivor. I bought more clothes than I could wear in a year.

Kate went me better. Gee! She did have a time! Of course, woman like, though she was a squaw, the first thing she thought about after she saw white women on the wharves at Skagway was clothes. Mrs. Saul Timmey to dress the part, and she was bound to do it. She bought a whole outfit of duds at the White House in Frisco, and got the chambermaid to help her into them; that's where she got the first jolt. It wasn't so easy as it looked. She couldn't walk in the high heeled shoes they wear here, and so she kept on moccasins. Corsets she gave up early in the game. They didn't show anyway, being inside. Finally she got a dressmaker to rig her up a sort of a loose red dress that they call a Mother Hubbard. Her favorite cover was an ermine cape. She bought it because it cost more than anything else in the fur store. She just splurged on hats and bonnets. I reckon she had a new one every day.

The thing that tickled her most was clothes, for her hands were good and busy. She wore white ones all the time. I s'pose it was because she felt she looked more like an American woman that way.

The swell togs she couldn't wear she bought just the same. We skated through town like a forest fire, me doing the talking and her the picking out. She got darned near everything that I ever knew women wore, and a big lot of others I never had heard of.

Every time she picked a thing and pulled out the yellow boys to pay for it her eyes stuck out. Of course, not being used to doing business that way, it looked to her like every clerk behind the counter was her slave, all ready to give her anything she said. She never got over her wonder at the "medicine stones."

She had to stop in front of every jewelry store she saw, but I couldn't get her to buy anything worth wearing. She just turned up her nose at diamonds and rubies, but at the sight of a cheap string of beads she went out of her head. She generally wore five or six necklaces of 'em over her head, and she didn't care and what she wanted she got.

Well, after she'd let the money run away from her for a couple of weeks, she got tired of the game and kind of homesick. She began to pine for cold weather and ice and all, while I was just beginning to enjoy the place. I tried to brace her up, and thinking it might please her to hear the seals bark at the Cliff House, we drove out there in a hack.

We were down to the "White House" store one day, when I run slap into Flora Donovan, that used to live next door to us in Virginia City. She was only a kid when I went North. I've grown up into considerable of a woman now, but I knew her. So I went up to her and offered to shake hands. She glared pretty hard until I told her who I was and how money had come my way. It seems her folks had struck it rich, and she had more money than she knew what to do with.

When Flora caught sight of Kate, staring at her, behind me, she flopped up one of those spectacles with handles and her eyebrows went up at the same time. She froze like an icepick, telling the Donovans he couldn't exceed the law.

There she stayed till 8 o'clock next morning, but it finally got through her head that Flora would never leave while she was there, so Kate decided to hide out and lay for her. She went

to be going. Said she hoped I'd call, but nothing about Kate, I noticed. I followed her off with my eyes, she was so pretty and high-toned now, the first decent white woman I'd talked to in years, and honest—oh, well, hang it, a man's got no license to be ashamed of his wife, but I don't know—Kate did look kind of funny in that red Mother Hubbard and the ermine cape and straw hat with moccasins and five strings of glass beads—doggone it, I hated myself for being ashamed of her, which all wasn't really, only somehow she looked different than she did before.

I tried to get her away but she stood stock-still watching Flora, who had walked off down to the cloak department at the end of the aisle. But if Kate don't want to move, all hell and an iceberg can't budge her, and I stood myself with her, feeling guilty enough, though I was just as fond of my wife as ever. All of a sudden Kate made a break for the counter where Flora Donovan was buying a cloak. The clerk all knew Flora by this time and the floorwalker chap would come on the hop-skip-and-a-jump and turn the shop upside down for her. So when she came up behind Miss Donovan and pointed to three of four expensive heavy cloaks and threw out a sack of double eagles to pay for 'em, letting the clerk take out what she wanted, she had everybody staring at her Flora included.

I could see well enough what was in Kate's mind. She had seen that it was just a little ashamed of her for some reason, and that Flora didn't think she was in her class. Kate wanted to show that she was the real thing, and a sure lady, and the only way she knew how to prove it was to beat Flora at buying. Kate didn't exactly want to put it over her, she only wanted to make good as the wife of Saul Timmey.

Flora only said: "Your wife has very good taste, Mr. Timmey," and sailed in to the women's underwear corner. Kate stuck to her like a burr. She was right at home there, and for about fifteen minutes it seemed like all the cash boys in the world were running in and out packing away the white things, just like Kate was a fairy queen giving orders. She laid down "medicine stones" on the counter till the flimsy and thimblebobs almost dropped down off the shelves of themselves. I s'pose a man really has no business to be in a place like that, but I watched the two of 'em buy. Kate had actually got Flora going, and both of 'em emptied their sacks. Then Flora swept out, looking a hole, through me, but never saying a word. I heard afterwards that Miss Donovan was pretty well known to be close-fisted, and it must have hurt her some to let go of all that money just on account of an Indian squaw. But the clerks behind the counter nearly went into fits.

Kate came up to me and said: "I can buy more things than she can, can't I?" And I said: "Sure you can, Kate; you could buy her right out of house and home!"

She looked a little relieved then, but I saw she was jealous, and the worst of it was, I'd given her license to be. I tried to be as nice as I could, and bought her another necklace, and took her to see the kinoscope and let her look through the telescope at the moon, but I saw she was still fretting about Flora. That night I met a fellow from the Yukon, and I left Kate at the hotel and made a night of it. I went to bed with considerable of a head and when I woke up, toward noon, Kate was gone. She didn't show up till the next day after that. I learned afterward what happened.

Kate started out bright and early to find Flora. She had got into a black dress with spangles, patent leather shoes, and a hat as big as a penguin. She carried with her all the cash we had at the hotel running into four figures easy. The shopping district of San Francisco ain't such a big place after all, and Kate and Flora only went to the best and highest priced stores, so it wasn't long before they met.

As far as I could find out, Kate didn't have her hatchet out at all, this trip, but she was just trying to make up to Flora, and be nice to her and show she was ready to get acquainted. You can guess what happened. Flora tried to pass Kate, but Kate just stood in the aisle like a house. It was no use for Flora to try and snub her, for Kate couldn't understand the kind of polite slaps in the face that women know how to give. The only thing was to get rid of her, so Flora up and went out the front door to her carriage.

Kate followed her to the sidewalk. When Flora got in Kate got in right alongside, grinning all over, showing her sack of gold, and trying her best to be as nice as she could. Flora was clean flabbergasted. She didn't want to make a holy show of herself on the street by calling the police, and so she told the driver to go home, as the best way out of it. So they drove to Van Ness avenue, Flora throwing conviction fits, she was so mad, and Kate smiling and talking Chinook, with her big hat on one ear.

When they got to the house Flora jumped out and loped up the steps, her cane and slapping the door. Kate tried to follow, but her tight dress and tight shoes were too much for her, and she fell down. That got Kate's mad up and when Kate's good and mad she's a mule. She banged at the door, but no one opened. So she sat down on the front doorstep to wait till Flora came out. You know what Indians are. She was ready to wait all night. She was used to nights six months long, a few hours in a San Francisco fog didn't worry her a bit. She took off her shoes and loosened her dress and stuck to the mat.

Flora got stuck out one of the hired help to drive Kate away. Kate pulled out one of her "medicine stones" that she had always found would work, and it worked all right. He went in with a twenty dollar gold piece and told all the rest of the help and they came out one by one and got twenties, while Kate froze to the door step. Then Flora telephoned for the police and a copper came up from the station to put Kate off the steps. He stopped when she handed him the first twenty. He put up his club when she brought out two more and went back, after telling the Donovans he couldn't exceed the law.

There she stayed till 8 o'clock next morning, but it finally got through her head that Flora would never leave while she was there, so Kate decided to hide out and lay for her. She went

across the street and sat down on the steps of the Presbyterian church, a couple of blocks away, where she drew a crowd of kids and nurse girls, till the cop on the beat came up and drove 'em away and collected another pair of twenties.

About 10 o'clock, Flora thinking the coast was clear, came out and got into her carriage. Kate was ready for her, holding up her skirts in one hand and her shoes in the other. The carriage drove off and Kate fell in behind on a little trot. You know how Indians run; they can keep it up all day, and you can't get away from 'em. Flora saw her and made the driver whip up. There they went, lickety-split, a swell turnout, with Flora yelling at the driver to go faster, and about half a block behind poor old Kate, right in the middle of the street, on the car track, in dinky openwork lace stockings, with her shoes in one hand, going like a steam engine. Her hat fell off as she crossed Polk street, but Lord, she didn't care, she had barrels of 'em at the hotel. I guess they had a clear street all the way, it must have taken the crowd like a circus parade.

The police never caught on till they got to Kearney street, and there I was standing looking for my wife. A copper came out to call her for a crazy woman, but I got there first and bumped her into a hack.

When we got up to our rooms she was so queer and strange that for a little while I didn't know but she had gone nutty after all. She never said a word till she had straightened up her dress and put on her shoes and got out a new hat. Then she stood in front of a big looking glass. Finally she turned loose on me.

"I want to be white and have a thin nose and a little waist like an American woman. Where can I get that?"

"Oh, Kate," I said, "don't talk like that, old girl. You are good enough for me. You can't buy all that anyway."

Then she said, "You don't like me the way you like that other woman. How many medicine stones will it take to make me just as if I was white?"

Of course, I told her I was just as fond of her as ever, but she wouldn't have it that way. She asked me again how much money it would take, and I had to tell her that the magic was no good for things like that.

That seemed to kind of stun her, and she began to mope and pout. She went back in to her room and pattered around some. I didn't have the heart to follow her and see what she was up to. When she came out she had on her loose dress and her moccasins over her head was the same shawl she wore when she came out of the Klondike.

"Give me my medicine stones," she said to me. "I want all of them!"

She seemed to feel so sore. I went out and drew \$2,000 in twenties and brought 'em to her in two sacks. She didn't need to tell me what was up. She was going back to her own country and was going to get married, being the song of her tribe—"Death on the White Trail" when I came in. I was going to stay in Frisco. That was what Kate wanted, and what Kate wants she gets every time, if I have the say-so.

It happened there was a steamer going next morning, and Kate didn't leave her room nor speak to me till it was time to go down to the docks. I got her ticket and paid the purser to take good care of her. Even at the last we didn't do much talking—what was she use? We both understood, and her people don't waste words.

When the boat started she stood on the upper deck, looking at men. Then all of a sudden, she opened her two sacks of coin and began to throw the money-by handfuls into the bay, waiting till in shower after shower of gold till it was all gone.

Well, sir, the Yukon's the place, after all. I've blown in most all of my \$400,000, and what have I got for it? Kate will wait for me, the same way she waited for Flora Donovan. I've got one little claim I hung on to when I sold the rest, and I've got the fever again. As soon as I've had my fun out—and that won't be long—I'll make for the snow country.

And some day when Kate comes in from the fishing, she'll crawl into her hut and find me there, snaking by the fire.

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